

Mockingbird Wish Me Luck

Charles Bukowski

CHARLES BUKOWSKI

MOCKINGBIRD WISH ME LUCK

 HarperCollins e-books

for Linda King
for all the good reasons

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I

*the world is full of shipping clerks
who have read
the Harvard Classics*

a free 25 page booklet

dying for a beer dying
for and of life
on a windy afternoon in Hollywood
listening to symphony music from my little red radio
on the floor.

a friend said,
“all ya gotta do is go out on the sidewalk
and lay down
somebody will pick you up
somebody will take care of you.”

I look out the window at the sidewalk
I see something walking on the sidewalk
she wouldn't lay down there,
only in special places for special people with special \$\$\$\$
and
special ways
while I am dying for a beer on a windy afternoon in
Hollywood,
nothing like a beautiful broad dragging it past you on the
sidewalk
moving it past your famished window
she's dressed in the finest cloth
she doesn't care what you say
how you look what you do
as long as you do not get in her
way, and it must be that she doesn't shit or
have blood
she must be a cloud, friend, the way she floats past us.

I am too sick to lay down
the sidewalks frighten me
the whole damned city frightens me,
what I will become
what I have become
frightens me.

ah, the bravado is gone
the big run through center is gone
on a windy afternoon in Hollywood
my radio cracks and spits its dirty music
through a floor full of empty beerbottles.

now I hear a siren
it comes closer
the music stops
the man on the radio says,
“we will send you a free 25 page booklet:
FACE THE FACTS ABOUT COLLEGE COSTS.”

the siren fades into the cardboard mountains
and I look out the window again as the clasped fist of
boiling cloud comes down—
the wind shakes the plants outside
I wait for evening I wait for night I wait sitting in a chair
by the window—
the cook drops in the live
red-pink salty
rough-tit crab and
the game works
on

come get me.

the smoking car

they stop out front here
it looks as if the car is on fire
the smoke blazes blue from the hood and exhaust
the motor sounds like cannon shots
the car humps wildly
one guy gets out,
Jesus, he says, he takes a long drink from a
canvas water bag
and gives the car an eerie look.
the other guy gets out and looks at the car,
Jesus, he says,
and he takes a drink from a pint of whiskey,
then passes the bottle to his
friend.
they both stand and look at the car,
one holding the whiskey, the other the water bag.
they are not dressed in conventional hippie garb
but in natural old clothes
faded, dirty and torn.
a butterfly goes past my window
and they get back in the
car
and it bucks off in low
like a rodeo bronc
they are both laughing
and one has the bottle
tilted...

the butterfly is gone
and outside there is a globe of smoke
40 feet in circumference.

first human beings I've seen in Los Angeles
in 15 years.

the world's greatest loser

he used to sell papers in front:
"Get your winners! Get rich on a dime!"
and about the 3rd or 4th race
you'd see him rolling in on his rotten board
with roller skates underneath.
he'd propel himself along on his hands;
he just had small stumps for legs
and the rims of the skate wheels were worn off.
you could see inside the wheels and they would wobble
something awful
shooting and flashing
imperialistic sparks!
he moved faster than anybody, rolled cigarette dangling,
you could hear him coming
"god o mighty, what was that?" the new ones asked.

he was the world's greatest loser
but he never gave up
wheeling toward the 2 dollar window screaming:
"IT'S THE 4 HORSE, YOU FOOLS! HOW THE HELL YA
GONNA BEAT THE
4?"
up on the board the 4 would be reading
60 to one.
I never heard him pick a winner.

they say he slept in the bushes. I guess that's where he
died. he's not around any
more.

there was the big fat blonde whore
who kept touching him for luck, and
laughing.

nobody had any luck. the whore is gone
too.

I guess nothing ever works for us. we're fools, of course—

bucking the inside plus a 15 percent take,
but how are you going to tell a dreamer
there's a 15 percent take on the
dream? he'll just laugh and say,
is that all?

I miss those
sparks.

the garbageman

we do not accept unsolicited manuscripts
the garbageman said
dropping to one knee
and blowing the head away from the priest's
neck
and as the green bus stopped at the corner
a cripple got out and a witch and a little girl
with a flower.
we do not accept unsolicited manuscripts
the garbageman said
and he shot the cripple and the witch
but did not fire at the little girl,
then he ran down an alley
and climbed up on the roof of a garage,
reloaded
as the Goodyear Blimp sailed overhead
he pumped 6 shots, saying,
here are some unsolicited manuscripts,
and the blimp wavered, paused,
then began to nose down as 2 men parachuted
out
saying Hail Marys.
8 squad cars entered the area
and began to surround the garage
and the garbageman said,
we do not accept unsolicited manuscripts
and he got one cop,
and then they really began firing.
the garbageman stood up in the center of the sky,
threw his loaded rifle at them
and all the shells
and he said,
we do not accept unsolicited manuscripts,
and the first bullet got him in the chest,
spun him,
another in the back, one in the neck, and
he fell on top of the garage roof,
the blood rolling out on the tarpaper,
blood like syrup blood like honey blood like blood,
he said,
Holy Mary, we do not accept...

girl in a miniskirt reading the bible outside my window

Sunday. I am eating a
grapefruit. church is over at the Russian
Orthodox to the
west.

she is dark
of Eastern descent,
large brown eyes look up from the Bible
then down. a small red and black
Bible, and as she reads
her legs keep moving, moving,
she is doing a slow rhythmic dance
reading the Bible...
long gold earrings;
2 gold bracelets on each arm,
and it's a mini-*suit*, I suppose,
the cloth hugs her body,
the lightest of tans is that cloth,
she twists this way and that,
long young legs warm in the sun...

there is no escaping her being
there is no desire to...
my radio is playing symphonic music
that she cannot hear
but her movements coincide *exactly*
to the rhythms of the
symphony...

she is dark, she is dark
she is reading about God.

I am God.

moyamensing prison:

we shot craps in the exercise yard while the dummies played ball with a torn-up shirt wound into a ball
once or twice a day we had to break it up under a tommy gun from the tower—
some blank-faced screw pointing it at us, but,
by god, through it we somehow played and through some skill and luck
I soon had all the money in the yard.
and in the morning and in the days that followed—
the screws, the sparrows, the shivs, the dips, the strongarms, the looneys, the hustlers, the freaks, the discarded dream-presidents of America, the cook, in fact, all my critics, they all called me “Mr. Bukowski,” a kind of fleeting immortality I guess, but real as hogs’ heads or dead flowers, and the force of it got to me there:
“Mr. Bukowski,” ace-crapshooter, money-man in a world of almost no money.
immortality.
I didn’t recite them Shelley, no, and everything came to me after lights out: slim-hipped boys I didn’t want steaks and ice cream and cigars which I did want, and shaving cream, new razorblades, the latest copy of the *New Yorker*. what greater immortality than Heaven in Hell, and I continued to enjoy it until they threw me out on the streets back to my typewriter, innocent, lazy, frightened and mortal again.

notes upon the flaxen aspect:

a John F. Kennedy flower knocks upon my door and is
shot through the neck;
the gladiolas gather by the dozens around the tip of
India
dripping into Ceylon;
dozens of oysters read Germaine Greer.

meanwhile, I itch from the slush of the Philippines
to the eye of the minnow
the minnow being eaten by the cumulative dreams of
Simon Bolivar. O,
freedom from the limitation of angular distance would be
delicious.
war is perfect,
the solid way drips and leaks,
Schopenhauer laughed for 72 years,
and I was told by a very small man in a New York City
pawnshop
one afternoon:
“Christ got more attention than I did
but I went further on less...”

well, the distance between 5 points is the same as the
distance between 3 points is the same as the distance
between one point:

it is all as cordial as a bonbon:
all this that we are wrapped
in:

eunuchs are more exact than sleep

the postage stamp is mad, Indiana is ridiculous

the chameleon is the last walking flower.

funhouse

I drive to the beach at night
in the winter
and sit and look at the burned-down amusement pier
wonder why they just let it sit there
in the water.

I want it out of there,
blown-up,
vanished,
erased;
that pier should no longer sit there
with madmen sleeping inside
the burned-out guts of the funhouse...
it's awful, I say, blow the damn thing up,
get it out of my eyes,
that tombstone in the sea.

the madmen can find other holes
to crawl into.

I used to walk that pier when I was 8
years old.

another academy

how can they go on, you see them
sitting in old doorways
with dirty stained caps and thick clothes and
no place to go;
heads bent down, arms on
knees they wait.
or they stand in front of the Mission
700 of them
quiet as oxen
waiting to be let into the chapel
where they will sleep upright on the hard benches
leaning against each other
snoring and
dreaming;
men
without.

in New York City
where it gets colder
and they are hunted by their own
kind, these men often crawl under car radiators,
drink the anti-freeze,
get warm and grateful for some minutes, then
die.

but that is an older
culture and a wiser
one;
here they scratch and
wait,
while on Sunset Boulevard the
hippies and yippies
hitchhike in
\$50
boots.

out in front of the Mission I heard one guy say to
another:
“John Wayne won it.”
“Won what?” said the other guy

tossing the last of his rolled cigarette into the street.

I thought that was
rather good.

a day at the oak tree meet

Filet's Rule, the 12 horse around 12 to one, that was the first race, they had a different janitor in the men's room, and I didn't have the 2nd race either, Bold Courage, around 19 to one, my Kentucky Lark got a dead ride from the boy who stood up in the saddle all the way, which is hardly a way to ride a 2 to one shot, and I got a roast beef sandwich for \$1.10, if you're going to go broke you might as well eat well, and in the 3rd Grandby had to pull up to avoid Factional who came over on him, the stewards argued for 15 minutes before allowing it to stand, and there I was 52 dollars down and the mountains were dry, life was hardly worthwhile, and in the 4th, Aberion Bob I think was the play but I went to Misty Repose who got locked in the one hole at 6 furlongs and had nothing left when he swung out. A. Bob won handily and I was 67 dollars down, the coffee was a quarter and the coffee girl looked like an x-prostitute, which she probably wasn't, and then in the 5th, Christie's Star took it at thirteen to one and I was 3rd, I think with Bold Street, I can't beat those maiden races, and I was 77 dollars down and bought a hot dog which cost 50 cents and was gone in 2 bites, and then I had to go 20 win on Nearbrook, which won by 6 or 7 lengths but at 4 to 5, so I am still 65 dollars down and the mountains are still dry, but nobody is talking to me or bothering me, there's a chance. I put 15 win on Moving Express and 5 win on Choctaw Charlie and C.C. comes in at eight to one, and then I am only 37 dollars down, and we have the 8th race, Manta at 3 to 5 was a rather obvious bet, I looked for something to beat her and came up with Hollywood Gossip. Manta went on by, but I had been afraid of that and had only gone 5 win, I was 42 dollars down with one race to go, and I put 20 win on Vesperal and ten win on Cedar Cross, and Cedar Cross ran dead and Vesperal went wire to wire, so that was 72 down before the race, and you take the 84 dollar pay off and you've got 12 dollars profit. There you go: behind for 8 races, winner in the 9th. Nothing big, but bankroll intact. This comes,

my friends, out of years of training. There are thoroughbred horses and thoroughbred bettors. What you do is stay with your plays and let them come to you. Loving a woman is the same way, or loving life. You've got to work a bit for it. In a day or 2 I'll go again and get off better. You'll see me that night having a quiet drink at the track bar as the losers run for the parking lot. Don't talk to me or bother me and I won't bother you. All right?

rain

a symphony orchestra.
there is a thunderstorm,
they are playing a Wagner overture
and the people leave their seats under the trees
and run inside to the pavilion
the women giggling, the men pretending calm,
wet cigarettes being thrown away,
Wagner plays on, and then they are all under the
pavilion. the birds even come in from the trees
and enter the pavilion and then it is the Hungarian
Rhapsody #2 by Lizst, and it still rains, but look,
one man sits alone in the rain
listening. the audience notices him. they turn
and look. the orchestra goes about its
business. the man sits in the night in the rain,
listening. there is something wrong with him,
isn't there?
he came to hear the
music.

the colored birds

it is a highrise apt. next door
and he beats her at night and she screams and nobody stops it
and I see her the next day
standing in the driveway with curlers in her hair
and she has her huge buttocks jammed into black
slacks and she says, standing in the sun,
“god damn it, 24 hours a day in this place, I never go anywhere!”

then he comes out, proud, the little matador,
a pail of shit, his belly hanging over his bathing trunks—
he might have been a handsome man once, might have,
now they both stand there and he says,
“I think I’m goin’ for a swim.”
she doesn’t answer and he goes to the pool and
jumps into the fishless, sandless water, the peroxide-codein
water,
and I stand by the kitchen window drinking coffee
trying to unboil the fuzzy, stinking picture—
after all, you can’t live elbow to elbow to people without
wanting to
draw a number on them.
every time my toilet flushes they can hear it. every time they
go to bed I can hear them.

soon she goes inside and then comes out with 2 colored birds
in a cage. I don’t know what they are. they don’t talk. they
just move a little, seeming to twitch their tail-feathers and
shit. that’s all they do.

she stands there looking at them.
he comes out: the little tuna, the little matador, out of the pool,
a dripping unbeautiful white, the cloth of his wet suit gripping.
“get those birds in the house!”
“but the birds need sun!”
“I said, get those birds in the house!”
“the birds are gonna die!”
“you listen to me, I said, GET THOSE BIRDS IN THE HOUSE!”
she bends and lifts them, her huge buttocks in the black slacks
looking so sad.
he slams the door behind them. then I hear it.
BAM!

she screams
BAM! BAM!
she screams

then: BAM!
and she screams.

I pour another coffee and decide that that's a new one: he usually only beats her at night. it takes a man to beat his wife night and day. although he doesn't look like much he's one of the few real men around here.

another lousy 10 percenter

I have read your stuff with
sharp inter...
he said,
falling forward
and knocking over his wine.

get that bum
OUTA here! screamed my old
lady.

but ma, I said, he's my
agent! got a joint in
Plaza *Square!*

well, kiss my bubs, she said.

(she poured wine
all around,
the bat.)

I've represented, he said,
raisen his head, somerset mawn, ben heck
and tomas caryllie.

an' as you might 'ave surmised, 'e said,
mah cut, daddy-o, is *ten percent!*

'is haid fell
forshafts.

Ma? I asked. who's
forshafts?

Somerset Maun! she answered,
yo hashole!

making it

ignore all possible concepts and possibilities—
ignore Beethoven, the spider, the damnation of Faust—
just *make* it, babe, make it:
a house a car a belly full of beans
pay your taxes
fuck
and if you can't fuck
copulate.
make money but don't work too
hard—make somebody else *pay* to
make it—and
don't smoke too much but drink enough to
relax, and
stay off the streets
wipe your ass real good
use a lot of toilet paper
it's bad manners to let people know you shit or
could smell like it
if you weren't
careful.

*drunk
ol' bukowski
drunk*

I hold to the edge of the table
with my belly dangling over my
belt

and I glare at the lampshade
the smoke clearing
over
North Hollywood

the boys put their muskets down
lift high their fish-green beer

as I fall forward off the couch
kiss rug hairs like cunt
hairs

close as I've been in a
long time.

the poetry reading

at high noon
at a small college near the beach
sober
the sweat running down my arms
a spot of sweat on the table
I flatten it with my finger
blood money blood money
my god they must think I love this like the others
but it's for bread and beer and rent
blood money
I'm tense lousy feel bad
poor people I'm failing I'm failing

a woman gets up
walks out
slams the door

a dirty poem
somebody told me not to read dirty poems
here

it's too late.

my eyes can't see some lines
I read it
out—
desperate trembling
lousy

they can't hear my voice
and I say,
I quit, that's it, I'm
finished.

and later in my room
there's scotch and beer:
the blood of a coward.

this then
will be my destiny:
scrabbling for pennies in dark tiny halls

reading poems I have long since become tired
of.

and I used to think
that men who drove busses
or cleaned out latrines
or murdered men in alleys were
fools.

slim killers

there are 4 guys at the door
all 6 feet four
and checking in at
around 210 pounds,
slim killers.
come in, I say,
and they walk in with their drinks
and circle the old man—
so you're Bukowski, eh?
yeh, you fucking killers, what do you
want?
well, we don't have a car
and Lee needs a ride to this nightspot
in Hollywood.
let's go, I say.
we get into my car
all of us drunk, and
somebody in back says,
we've been reading your poetry a long time,
Bukowski, and I say,
I've been writing it a long time,
kid. we dump Lee at the nightspot
then stop off for enough beer and cigars
to demolish the
stratosphere.
back at my place I sit with the killers and
we drink and smoke.
it is somehow enjoyable.
I find I can outdrink and outsmoke them
but I realize that in areas such as fights on
the front lawn
my day is done.
the motherfuckers are just getting too young and
too big.
after they pass out
I give each of them a pillow and a blanket
and make sure all the cigars are
out.

in the morning they were just 3 big kids
untrapped, a couple of them

heaving in the bathroom.
an hour later
they were gone.

readers of my poems
I can't say that
I disliked them.

the last days of the suicide kid

I can see myself now
after all these suicide days and nights,
being wheeled out of one of those sterile rest homes
(of course, this is only if I get famous and lucky)
by a subnormal and bored nurse...
there I am sitting upright in my wheelchair...
almost blind, eyes rolling backward into the dark part of my
skull
looking
for the mercy of death...

“Isn’t it a lovely day, Mr. Bukowski?”

“O, yeah, yeah...”

the children walk past and I don’t even exist
and lovely women walk by
with big hot hips
and warm buttocks and tight hot everything
praying to be loved
and I don’t even
exist...

“It’s the first sunlight we’ve had in 3 days,
Mr. Bukowski.”

“Oh, yeah, yeah.”

there I am sitting upright in my wheelchair,
myself whiter than this sheet of paper,
bloodless,
brain gone, gamble gone, me, Bukowski,
gone...

“Isn’t it a lovely day, Mr. Bukowski?”

“O, yeah, yeah...” pissing in my pajamas, slop drooling out of
my mouth.

2 young schoolboys run by—

"Hey, did you see that old guy?"

"Christ, yes, he made me sick!"

after all the threats to do so
somebody else has committed suicide for me
at last.

the nurse stops the wheelchair, breaks a rose from a nearby
bush,
puts it in my hand.

I don't even know
what it is. it might as well be my pecker
for all the good
it does.

bang bang

absolutely sesamoid
said the skeleton
shoving his chalky foot
upon my desk,
and that was it,
bang bang,
he looked at me,
and it was my bone body
and I was what remained,
and there was a newspaper
on my desk
and somebody folded the newspaper
and I folded,
I was the newspaper
under somebody's arm
and the sheet of me
had eyes
and I saw the skeleton
watching
and just before the door closed
I saw a man who looked
partly like Napoleon,
partly like Hitler,
fighting with my skeleton,
then the door closed
and we went down the steps
and outside
and I was under
the arm
of a fat little man
who knew nothing
and I hated him
for his indifference
to fact, how I hated him
as he unfolded me
in the subway
and I fell against the back
of an old woman.

5 men in black passing my window

5 men in black passing my window
it's Sunday
they've been to church.

5 men in black passing my window;
they're between 40 and 60
each with a little smile on his face
like a tarantula.

they're without women;
I am too.

look at them,
it's the way they walk by fives—
no two together,
not speaking,
just the little smiles.

each has done his horrible thing
during the week—
fired a stockboy, stolen from a partner;
cowardly horrible little men
passing my window.

5 men in black with little
smiles.

I could machinegun them
without feeling
banal

bury them without a tear:
death of all these things
Springtime.

the poet's muse

there was one
made a thousand dollars
one day
in a town no larger than
El Paso
jumping taxies between
universities and ladies'
clubs.

hell, you can't blame him;
I've worked for \$16 a week,
quit, and lived a month on
that.

his wife is suing for divorce
and wants \$200 a week
alimony.

he has to stay famous and
keep
talking.

I see his work
everywhere.

somebody

god I got the sad blue blues,
this woman sat there and she
said

are you really Charles
Bukowski?

and I said

forget that
I do not feel good
I've got the sad sads
all I want to do is
fuck you

and she laughed
she thought I was being
clever

and O I just looked up her long slim legs of heaven
I saw her liver and her quivering intestine
I saw Christ in there
jumping to a folk-rock

all the long lines of starvation within me
rose

and I walked over
and grabbed her on the couch
ripped her dress up around her face

and I didn't care
rape or the end of the earth
one more time
to be there
anywhere
real

yes
her panties were on the
floor
and my cock went in
my cock my god my cock went in

I was Charles
Somebody.

story and poem

look, he said, that story,
everybody knew it was me.

by god, I said, are you still
hacking at that?
I thought you were going to write a
story exposing *me*?
what happened to that?

you didn't have to write that
story about me!

forget it, I said, it's not
important.

he leaped and slammed the door;
the glass didn't break
but the curtain rod and curtain
fell.

I tried to finish a one-act play
gave up
and went to bed.

the phone rang.

listen, he said, when I came over
I had no idea I'd act like
that.

it's o.k., I said.
relax.

I leaned back to sleep and I
thought,
now I'll probably write a poem about
him.

there seems to be no way out, I thought,
everybody is always angry about the truth
even though they claim to
believe in it.

I slept and wrote the poem
in the morning.

*and the moon and the stars
and the world:*

long walks at
night—
that's what's good
for the
soul:
peeking into windows
watching tired
housewives
trying to fight
off
their beer-maddened
husbands.

get the nose

comfrock, you motherfuck
get up off your crazy knees
and I'll belt you down
again—

what's that?
you say I eat stem pipes?
I'll kill you!

stop crying. god damn.
all right, we dumped your car into the sea
and raped your daughter
but we are only extending the possibilities of a working
realism, shut up!, I said
any man must be ready for anything and
if he isn't then he isn't a
man a goat a note or a plantleaf,
you shoulda known the entirety of the trap, asshole,
love means eventual pain
victory means eventual defeat
grace means eventual slovenliness,
there's no way
out...you see, you
understand?

hey, Mickey, hold his head up
want to break his nose with this pipe...
god damn, I almost forgot the
nose!

death is every second, punk.
the calendar is death. the sheets are death. you put on your
stockings: death. buttons on your shirt are death.
lace sportshirts are death. don't you smell it? temperature is
death. little girls are death. free coupons are death. carrots are
death. didn't you
know?

o.k., Mack, we got the nose.
no, not the balls, too much bleeding.
what was he *when*? oh, yeah, he used to be a cabby
we snatched him from his cab
right off Madison, destroyed his home, his car, raped his
12 year old daughter, it was beautiful, burned his wife with
gasoline.
look at his eyes
begging mercy...

my landlady and my landlord

56, she leans
forward
in the kitchen
2:25 a.
m.
same red
sweater
holes in
elbows

cook him something to
EAT
he says
from the
same red
face

3 years ago
we broke down a tree
fighting
 after he caught me
kissing
 her.

beer by the
quarts
we drink
bad beer
 by the
 quarts

she gets up
and
begins to
fry
something

all night
we sings songs
songs from 1925 a.
d. to

1939 a.
d.

we talk about
short skirts
Cadillacs the
Republican Administration
the depression
taxes
horses
Oklahoma

here
you son of a bitch,
she says.

drunk
I lean forward and
eat.

bad night

Bartenders are human too
and when he reached for the baseball bat
the little Italian hit him in the face
with a bottle
and several whores screamed.
I was just coming out
of the men's room
when I saw the bartender
get off the floor
and open the cigar box
to get the gun,
and I turned around
and went out back,
and the Italian
must have argued poorly
because I heard the shot
just as I got
the car door open.

I drove down the alley
and turned East on 7th st.,
and I hadn't gone a block
before a cop pulled me over.

You trying to get killed?
he asked. Turn your lights
on.

He was a big fat one and he
kept pushing his helmet
further and further
on the back of his head.

I took the ticket and then
drove down to Union. I
parked outside the Reno Hotel
and went downstairs
to Harry's.

It was quiet there, only
a big redhead, bigger
than the cop.

She called me Honey
and I ordered 2.

hogs in the sky

the territory of the diamond and the territory of the cross
and the territory of the spider and the territory of the butcher
divided by the territory of you and me
subtracted from the territory of mathematical
reality
multiplied by those tombstones in the
moonlight

just going on
is a greater gut-miracle than the life-death cycle
itself, I mean
going on against uselessness—
that's different than living,
say, the way a fly lives;
the brain gives us enough light to know
that living is only an artful sacrifice
at best. at worst, it's
hogs in the sky.

the territory of the darning needle
the territory of the mustard jar
the territory of mad dogs and love gone stale

the territory of you and me

each evening bent like the point of a thumb tack
that will no longer stick
in
each kiss a hope of returning to the first kiss
each fuck the same
each person nailed against diminishing
returns
we are slaves to hopes that have run to
garbage
as old age
arrives on schedule.

the territory of meeting and leaving
the territory of you and me
death arrived on schedule on a

Sunday afternoon, and,
as always,
it was easier than we thought
it would be.

the white poets

the white poets usually knock quite early
and keep knocking and ringing
ringing and knocking
even though all the shades are down;
finally I arise with my hangover
figuring such persistency
must mean good fortune, a prize of some
sort—female or monetary,
“aw right! aw right!” I shout
looking for something to cover my ugly
naked body. sometimes I must vomit first,
then gargle; the gargle only makes me vomit again.
I forget it—go to the door—
“hello?”
“you Bukowski?”
“yeh. come in.”

we sit and look at each other—
he very vigorous and young—
latest blooming clothes—
all colors and silk—
face like a weasel—
“you don’t remember me?” he
asks.
“no.”

“I was here before. you were rather short. you didn’t like my
poems.”
“there are plenty of reasons for not liking
poems.”
“try these.”

he put them on me. they were flatter than the paper they were
typed
upon. there wasn’t a tick or a
flare. not a sound. I’d never read
less.

“uh,” I said, “uh-uh.”

“you mean you don’t LIKE
them?”

“there’s nothing there—it’s like a pot of evaporated piss.”

he took the papers, stood up and walked around. "look, Bukowski. I'll put some broads from Malibu on you, broads like you've never seen."

"oh yeah, baby?" I asked.

"yeah, yeah," he said.

and ran out the door.

his Malibu broads were like his poems: they never arrived.

the black poets

the black poets
young
come to my door—
“you Bukowski?”
“yeh. come in.”

they sit and look around at the
destroyed room
and at
me.

they hand me their poems.
I read
them.

“no,” I say and hand them
back.

“you don’t like
them?”

“no.”

“roi Jones came down to see us at our
workshop...”

“I hate,” I say,
“workshops.”

“...Leroi Jones, Ray Bradbury, lots of big
boys...they said this stuff was
good...”

“it’s bad poetry, man. they are powdering your
ass.”

“there’s this big film-writer too. he started the whole
idea: Watts Writers’ Workshop.”

“ah, god, don’t you *see*? they are tickling your
assholes! you should have burned the whole town

down! I'm sick of it!"

"you just don't understand
the poems..."

"I do, they are rhymers, full of
platitudes. you write bad
poetry."

"look muthafucka, I been on the radio, I been printed in the *L.A. Times*!"

"oh?"

"well, that happened to
you?"

"no."

"o.k., muthafucka, you ain't seen the *last* of
me!"

I suppose I haven't. and it's useless to tell you that I am not
anti-black
because
somehow
that's when the whole subject becomes
sickening.

millionaires

you
no faces
no faces
at all
laughing at nothing—
let me tell you
I have drunk in skidrow rooms with
imbecile winos
whose cause was better
whose eyes still held some light
whose voices retained some sensibility,
and when the morning came
we were sick but not ill,
poor but not deluded,
and we stretched in our beds and rose
in the late afternoons
like millionaires.

poetry

the bus driver grins while sweating in the heat
of the plateglass windshield,
he doesn't have a chance—
only Hollywood Boulevard, an impossible sun
and an impossible timetable,
there are so many without a chance.
I realize that there is very little chance
for any of
us. poetry won't save us or a job won't save us,
a good job or a bad
job.
we take a little bit and hang onto that until it is
gone.
gongs ring, dances begin, there are holidays and
celebrations...
we try to cheat the bad dream...
poetry, you whore, who will go to any man and then
leave him...
the bus driver has Hollywood Boulevard
I sit next to a fat lady who lays her dead thigh
against me.
there is a tiny roll of sweat behind one of the bus driver's
ears. he is ashamed to brush it
away.
the people look ahead or read or look out their
windows.
the tiny roll of sweat begins to roll
it rolls along behind the ear
then down the neck,
then it's
gone.
Vine street, says the bus driver,
this is Vine
street.
he's right, at last. what a marvelous thing.
I get off at Vine Street. I need a drink or something
to eat. I don't care about the bus
anymore. it is a
rejected poem. I don't need it
anymore.
there will be more busses.

I decide upon something to eat
with a drink as
openers.

I walk out of the dark and into the dark
and sit down and
wait.

the painter

he came up on the porch
with a grinning subnormal type
and they stood there
drunk on wine.

the painter had his coat wrapped around something,
then pulled the coat away—
it was a policeman's helmet
complete with badge.

"gimme 20 bucks for this," he said.

"fuck off, man," I said, "what do I want with a
cop's derby?"

"ten bucks," he said.

"did you kill him?"

"5 bucks..."

"what happened to that 6 grand you made
at your art show last month?"

"I drank it. all in the same bar."

"and I never got a beer," I said.

"2 bucks..."

"did you kill him?"

"we ganged him, punched him around a bit..."

"that's chickenshit. I don't want the headpiece."

"we're 18 cents short of a bottle, man..."

I gave the painter 35 cents
keeping the chain on the door, slipping it to him
with my fingers. he lived with his mother,
beat his girlfriend regularly
and really didn't paint that
well. but I suppose a lot of obnoxious characters
work their way into
immortality.

I'm working on it myself.

the inquisitor

in the bathtub rereading Céline's
Journey to the End of the Night
the phone rings
and I get out
grab a towel.
some guy from *SMART SET*,
he wants to know what's in my mailbox
how my life has been
going.
I tell him there isn't anything in the
mailbox or the
life.
he thinks that I'm holding
back. I hope that
I am.

my friend william

my friend William is a fortunate man:
he lacks the imagination to suffer

he kept his first job
his first wife

can drive a car 50,000 miles
without a brake job

he dances like a swan
and has the prettiest blankest eyes
this side of El Paso

his garden is a paradise
the heels of his shoes are always level
and his handshake is firm

people love him

when my friend William dies
it will hardly be from madness or cancer

he'll walk right past the devil
and into heaven

you'll see him at the party tonight
grinning
over his martini

blissful and delightful
as some guy
fucks his wife in the
bathroom.

300 poems

look, he said, I've written
300 poems in 2
months,
and he handed me the
stack and I
thought
oo oo.
a young girl
walked up
and handed him a plate of
corn and meat
in his cottage
by the beach
and the sea rolled in
and I turned the
white
pages.
I've been drinking
he said
and writing
and the young girl said
is there anything else
I can get
you?
he was rich and I was poor
and the sea rolled in
and I turned the
white
pages.
what do you think?
he asked?
and I said,
well, some of
these...
but I didn't
finish.
later I walked
outside. I walked down
the sand to where the sand got
wet and I looked at the water and
the moon

and then I turned around
and I walked up to the
boardwalk and I thought,
oo oo.

lifting weights at 2 a.m.

queers do this
or is it that you're
afraid to die?
biceps, triceps, forceps,
what are you going to do
with muscles?
well, muscles please the ladies
and keep the bullies
at bay—
so
what?
is it worth it?
is it worth the collected works
of Balzac?
or a 3 week vacation
in Spain?
or, is it another way of
suffering?
if you got paid to do it,
you'd hate it.
if a man got paid to make love,
he'd hate it.

still, one needs the
exercise—
this writing game:
only the brain and soul get
worked-out.
quit your bitching and
do it.
while other people are
sleeping
you're lifting a mountain
with rivers of poems
running off.

reality

my little famous bleeding elbows
my knotty knees (especially) and
even my balls
hairy and wasted.
these blue evenings of walking past buildings
where Jews pray beautifully about seasons I
know nothing of
and would leave me alone
with the roaches and ants climbing my dying body
in some place
too real to touch.

earthquake

Americans don't know what tragedy is—
a little 6.5 earthquake can set them to chattering
like monkeys—
a piece of chinaware broken,
the Union Rescue Mission falls down—

6 a.m.
they sit in their cars
they're all driving around—
where are they going?

a little excitement has broken into their
canned lives

stranger stands next to stranger
chattering gibberish fear
anxious fear
anxious laughter...

my baby, my flowerpots, my ceiling
my bank account

this is just a tickler
a feather
and they can't bear it...

suppose they bombed the city
as other cities have been bombed
not with an a-bomb
but with ordinary blockbusters
day after day,
every day
as has happened
in other cities of the world?

if the rest of the world could see you today
their laughter would bring the sun to its knees
and even the flowers would leap from the ground
like bulldogs
and chase you away to where you belong
wherever that is,
and who cares where it is
as long as it's somewhere away from
here.

the good life at o'hare airport

3 hour wait at the airport in
Chicago, surrounded by killers
I found a table alone
and had a scotch and water
when 4 preachers sat down,
and look here, said one of them,
looking at a newspaper,
here's a guy drunk, ran through a
wall, killed one person, injured 4.
if I was him, said another,
I'd commit suicide.
I ordered a large beer
and sat there reading my own novel.
look here, said the one with the paper,
here's a guy, no, two guys,
tried to hijack a liquor truck,
they were so dumb they didn't even know
it was only carrying wine. didn't even
break the seal. bound the driver
and then stopped for coffee. the driver
leaned on the horn and a cop car came by
and that was it. they went in and got
those 2 guys.
any 2 guys that dumb, said another,
they sure have it coming.
look sweetie, said another to the waitress,
we don't want anything to drink, we don't drink,
but we could sure use 4
coffees, and haven't I seen you someplace before,
hee hee hee?
give me another beer, I told the
waitress. I drink, and I've never seen you anyplace
before.
the waitress came back with 4 cups of coffee
and the beer, and I sat there reading my own novel
as the 4 preachers sat there
whirling their spoons around their cups,
clink clink clink
and I thought, this isn't a bad novel
this isn't a bad novel
at all, but the next one is going to be

better, and I lifted my old beer and finished it,
and then drank some of the new
one, and clink clink clink
went the spoons against the cups
and one of the preachers coughed
and everybody was unhappy but
me.

the golfers

driving through the park
I notice men and women playing golf
driving in their powered carts
over billiard table lawns,
they are my age
but their bodies are fat
their hair grey
their faces waffle batter,
and I remember being startled by my own face
scarred, and mean as red ants
looking at me from a department store mirror
and the eyes mad mad mad
I drive on and start singing
making up the sound
a war chant
and there is the sun
and the sun says, good, I know you,
and the steering wheel is humorous
and the dashboard laughs,
see, the whole sky knows
I have not lied to anything
even death will have exits
like a dark theatre.
I stop at a stop sign and
as fire burns the trees and the people and the city
I know that there will be a place to go
and a way to go
and nothing need ever be
lost.

II

*spider on the wall:
why do you take
so long?*

the mockingbird

the mockingbird had been following the cat
all summer
mocking mocking mocking
teasing and cocksure;
the cat crawled under rockers on porches
tail flashing
and said something angry to the mockingbird
which I didn't understand.

yesterday the cat walked calmly up the driveway
with the mockingbird alive in its mouth,
wings fanned, beautiful wings fanned and flopping,
feathers parted like a woman's legs,
and the bird was no longer mocking,
it was asking, it was praying
but the cat
striding down through centuries
would not listen.

I saw it crawl under a yellow car
with the bird
to bargain it to another place.

summer was over.

ha ha ha ha ha, ha ha

monkey feet
small and blue
walking toward you
as the back of a building falls off
and an airplane chews the white sky,
doom is like the handle of a pot,
it's there,
know it,
have ice in your tea,
marry,
have children, visit your
dentist,
do not scream at night
even if you feel like screaming,
count ten
make love to your wife,
or if your wife isn't there
if there isn't anybody there
count 20,
get up and walk to the kitchen
if you have a kitchen
and sit there sweating
at 3 a.m. in the morning
monkey feet
small and blue
walking toward you.

a fine day and the world looks good

someday the lion will
walk in
he'll grab an arm
just above the elbow
my old arm
my wrinkled dice-shooting arm
and
I'll scream
in my bedroom
I won't understand at all
and he'll be
too strong for me,
and people will walk in—
a wife, a girlfriend, a bastard son,
a stranger from down the street
and a
doctor
and
they will
watch
and the lion won't bother them
yet,
and then my arm will be
gone
the doctor will put the
stethoscope to my chest
ask me to cough
then
he will turn to the others and
say
 there's a chance
 but I think he's going
 under—shock and loss of
 blood.

hell, I know that,
and now the lion has my
other arm
I try to knee him
his tail knocks a picture off the wall

a picture of a Dutch windmill and a pond

it is a fine day
the world looks good
I feel I'd like to be
swimming or fishing or sleeping
under a tree
but the lion will not
let go

then
my other arm is
gone

the people kneel to
pray
all but the
doctor

the lion is clawing at my
chest
trying to get at the
heart
I ask the doctor to light me a
cigarette and
he does

then the
priest walks
in

the lion does not bother the priest
yet

I'd heard about the
lion
about how sometimes he was fast or sometimes he was
slow

I knew he usually preferred older people
although sometimes he even ate

babies or young men and
girls

god o mighty! save me! save me!
I scream

but the people do not
move
they let the lion
eat me
the priest mumbles incantations I do not
understand
the doctor turns his back and looks
out the window

it is the month of July
with the taste of butter in the air
and I am rapidly becoming a
keepsake thing
as before my eyes I see the
moth, butcherbird, dove, vulture and
angel
burning

the lion eats my heart
and the doctor puts the sheet over my
head
and it is early in the
morning
very early in the
morning
and decent people are still
in bed
most of them asleep with bad breath
and very few of them making
love
and most of them
not like me
yet

vacancy

sun-stroked women
without men
on a Santa Monica monday;
the men are working or in jail
or insane;
one girl floats in a rubber suit,
waiting...
houses slide off the edges of cliffs
and down into the sea.
the bars are empty
the lobster eating houses are empty;
it's a recession, they say,
the good days are
over.
you can't tell an unemployed man
from an artist any more,
they all look alike
and the women look the same,
only a little more desperate.

we stop at a hippie hole
in Topanga Canyon...
and wait, wait, wait;
the whole area of the canyon and the beach
is listless
useless
VACANCY, it says, PEOPLE WANTED.

the wood has no fire
the sea is dirty
the hills are dry
the temples have no bells
love has no bed

sun-stroked women without men
one sailboat
life drowned.

3:16 and one half...

here I'm supposed to be a great poet
and I'm sleepy in the afternoon
here I am aware of death like a giant bull
charging at me
and I'm sleepy in the afternoon
here I'm aware of wars and men fighting in the ring
and I'm aware of good food and wine and good women
and I'm sleepy in the afternoon
I'm aware of a woman's love
and I'm sleepy in the afternoon,
I lean into the sunlight behind a yellow curtain
I wonder where the summer flies have gone
I remember the most bloody death of Hemingway
and I'm sleepy in the afternoon.

some day I won't be sleepy in the afternoon
some day I'll write a poem that will bring volcanoes
to the hills out there
but right now I'm sleepy in the afternoon
and somebody asks me, "Bukowski, what time is it?"
and I say, "3:16 and a half."
I feel very guilty, I feel obnoxious, useless,
demented, I feel
sleepy in the afternoon,
they are bombing churches, o.k., that's o.k.,
the children ride ponies in the park, o.k., that's o.k.,
the libraries are filled with thousands of books of knowledge,
great music sits inside the nearby radio
and I am sleepy in the afternoon,
I have this tomb within myself that says,
ah, let the others do it, let them win,
let me sleep,
wisdom is in the dark
sweeping through the dark like brooms,
I'm going where the summer flies have gone,
try to catch me.

the rat

with one punch, at the age of 16 and 1/2,
I knocked out my father,
a cruel shiny bastard with bad breath,
and I didn't go home for some time, only now and then
to try to get a dollar from
dear momma.

it was 1937 in Los Angeles and it was a hell of a
Vienna.

I ran with these older guys
but for them it was the same:
mostly breathing gasps of hard air
and robbing gas stations that didn't have any
money, and a few lucky among us
worked part-time as Western Union messenger
boys.

we slept in rented rooms that weren't rented—
and we drank ale and wine
with the shades down
being quiet quiet
and then awakening the whole building
with a fistfight
breaking mirrors and chairs and lamps
and then running down the stairway
just before the police arrived
some of us soldiers of the future
running through the empty starving streets and alleys of
Los Angeles
and all of us
getting together later
in Pete's room
a small cube of space under a stairway, there we were,
packed in there
without women
without cigarettes
without anything to drink,
while the rich pawed away at their many
choices and the young girls let
them,

the same girls who spit at our shadows as we walked past.

it was a hell of a Vienna.

3 of us under that stairway
were killed in World War II.

another one is now manager of a mattress company.

me? I'm 30 years older,
the town is 4 or 5 times as big
but just as rotten
and the girls still spit on my shadow, another war is building for another reason, and I can hardly get a job now for the same reason I couldn't then:
I don't know anything, I can't do anything.

sex? well, just the old ones knock on my door after midnight. I can't sleep and they see the lights and are curious.

the old ones. their husbands no longer want them, their children are gone, and if they show me enough good leg (the legs go last)
I go to bed with them.

so the old women bring me love and I smoke their cigarettes as they talk talk talk
and then we go to bed again and I bring *them* love
and they feel good and talk
until the sun comes up, then we sleep.

it's a hell of a Paris.

hot

I was up under the attic and it was almost summer
and I sat around drinking wine
and watching the hot pigeons suffer and fuck
on the hot roof
and I listened to sounds on my radio and
drank the wine
and I sat there naked and sweating
and wishing I were back in the journalism class
where everybody was a
genius.

it was even hot when I got thrown out of there
for non-payment of rent and I signed on with a
track gang going West—the windows wouldn't open
and the seats and sides of the cars were 100 years old with
dust. they gave us cans of food but no openers
and we busted the cans against the side of the seats
ate raw hash, raw lima beans
the water tasted like candlewick
and I leaped out under a line of trees in the middle of
Texas, some small town, and the police found me asleep
on a park bench and put me in a cell with only a crapper,
no water, no sink, and they questioned me about robberies and
murders,
under a hot light
and getting nothing
they drove me to the next town 17 miles away
the big one kicked me in the ass
and after a good night's sleep
I went into the local library
where the young lady librarian seemed to take an interest in
my
reading habits
and later we went to bed
and I woke up with teethmarks all over me and I said,
Christ, watch it, baby, you might give me
cancer!

you're an idiot, she said.

I suppose that I
was.

radio

strange eyes in my head
I'm the coward and the fool and the clown
and I listen to a man telling me that I can get a
restaurant guide and an expanding cultural events calendar

I'm just not here today
I don't want restaurants and expanding cultural events
I want an old shack in the hills
rent free
with enough to eat and drink until I die

strange eyes in my head
strange ways

no chance

ariel

oh my god, oh my dear god
that we should end up
on the end of a rope
in some slimy bathroom
far from Paris,
far from thighs that care,
our feet hanging down
above the simplicity
of stained tile,
telephone ringing,
letters unopened,
dogs pissing in the street...

greater men than I
have failed to agree with Life.

I wish you could have met my brother, Marty:
vicious, intelligent, endearing,
doing
quite well.

the passing of a dark gray moment

Standing here,
doing what?
as exposed as an azalea
to a bee.

Where's the axman,
where's it done?

They tiptoe round
on rotting wood,
peeking into shelves.
Summertime!

Where's the sun,
where's the sea?

The god's are gone!
Everything hums
with humble severity...
they wipe their faces
with cotton and rags
—and *wait* for morning.

Where's the fire,
where's the burn?

Rain-spouts! and rats
printing dirge-notes in ashes...
a voice plows my brain:
“the gods are dead.”

Where's the time,
where's the place?

Somewhat eased, extinguished,
I listen behind me
to my bird eating seed,
hoping he'll chitter
and peep some pink
back into white elbows.

I love that bird,
the simple needing of seed, so clear:

A god can be anything
that's needed right away.
The sound of aircraft overhead
winging a man...
stronger now, not yet pure,
but moving away the dread.

consummation of grief

I even hear the mountains
the way they laugh
up and down their blue sides
and down in the water
the fish cry
and all the water
is their tears.

I listen to the water
on nights I drink away
and the sadness becomes so great
I hear it in my clock
it becomes knobs upon my dresser
it becomes paper on the floor
it becomes a shoehorn
a laundry ticket
it becomes
cigarette smoke
climbing a chapel of dark vines...

it matters little

very little love is not so bad
or very little life

what counts
is waiting on walls
I was born for this

I was born to hustle roses down the avenues of the dead.

those sons of bitches

the dead come running sideways
holding toothpaste ads,
the dead are drunk on New Year's eve
satisfied at Christmas
thankful on Thanksgiving
bored on the 4th of July
loafing on Labor Day
confused at Easter
cloudy at funerals
clowning at hospitals
nervous at birth;
the dead shop for stockings and shorts
and belts and rugs and vases and
coffeetables,
the dead dance with the dead
the dead sleep with the dead
the dead eat with the dead.

the dead get hungry looking at hogs' heads.

the dead get rich
the dead get deader

those sons of bitches

this graveyard above the ground

one tombstone for the mess,
I say:
humanity, you never had it
from the beginning.

the hunt

by god, it was a long day
the 3 horse broke down
the cook burned his hand,
e. pitts was recalled from the sandlots
because the regular back had a
hamstring,
and the grunion ran again
through the oily sea
to plant eggs on shore and be caught
by unemployed drunks
with flopping canvas hats
and no woman at all.
offshore you could see the lights of a
passing yacht
with a party on board,
lots of girls and jokes and the
rest,
and they put the 3 horse in
the truck, carried him away from the
crowd and shot
him, little things like that and other
things
are what sometimes create unemployed drunks
with flopping canvas hats,
sans woman,
trying to grab for
grunion.

the big fire

I'm on fire like the cactus in the desert
I'm on fire like the palms of an acrobat
I'm on fire like the fangs of the spider

I'm on fire with you and me

I'm on fire walking into a drugstore
I'm on fire I'm on fire
 the girl hands me my change and
 laughs at me

I'm on fire in my bed alone
I'm on fire with you

I'm on fire reading a book
about Trotsky, Hitler, Alexander the Great,
anybody at all, any walking living dead
human once upon the
earth

I'm on fire looking at the grass
I'm on fire looking at birds sitting on telephone wires
I'm on fire answering the phone—
 I leap straight up when it rings
 I am burning

I'm on fire looking at velvet
I'm on fire looking at a sleeping cat

I am a helpless burning thing
among other helpless burning things

I lay on my left side and look at the tombstones
then I lay on my right side and look at the tombstones—
they are all
burning

I'm on fire putting a stamp on an envelope
I'm on fire wrapping garbage into a newspaper
I'm on fire with heroes and dwarfs and poverty and hope
I'm on fire with love and anger

I'm on fire like a bat hanging upsidedown
like a bellboy hating the rich and smiling at their tips

I'm on fire in a supermarket
watching a most womanly woman
bend over to pick up some potato salad

I'm on fire like a scissors cutting the eyes out of the sky
I'm on fire like onehundredthousand monkeys boiled into one
heart
and sobbing through centuries of
hopelessness

I'm on fire like a clean sharp knife in a kitchen drawer

I'm on fire like a beggar in India
a beggar in New York
a beggar in Los Angeles...
the smoke and burning rises
and the ash is crushed under...

I'm on fire like the circus that went away
the champion who quit on one knee
all burning
all alone
all one
ash

I'm on fire like a dirty bathtub in a lonely roominghouse
I'm on fire like the roach I kill with my shoe

I'm on fire with men and woman and animals
who are being tortured and mutilated in dark and
isolated places

I'm on fire with the armies and anti-armies
I'm on fire with the man I hate most in the world

I'm on fire without a chance

the fat is in the fire, the lamb is over it
the sacrifice seems forever
the enduring seems forever

the sun is on fire...

and the glazed horizon is red
and the weeping
and the weeping
and you and me

the sun is burning everything:

the dogs, the clouds, the icecream

the end

the end of the stairway
the end of the ocean
the last scream

the bug in the jar
spouts into flame
and the inside of the skull
gives up
at last

the smoke blows
away.

ww 2

since fact is an artifice of fiction
let's call this fiction so like all good boys and girls
we can relax

i was in frisco a dandy place with lakes or something i could see the gold bridge and it wasn't teeth from my window enough to drink almost always enough to drink

i wrote the old man down in l.a. you might as well get a story ready for your god damned neighbors because i am not going to yr war

if it were not for the war the last war *you would not be here* i would not have met your mother and you would not have been born
SON, YOUR COUNTRY IS AT WAR !!!!

the fact that i was born because of circumstances of war
did not seem to me a proper argument to create further circumstances

i went out and got drunk properly

then the next morning i went down to the draft board

a boy fainted when they took blood out of his arm and i looked at the needle dip into my vein and watched the red of me run up into the tube and felt rugged

they looked up my ass
and then i went in to see the sike

u have yr shorts on backwards he told me
i got up and switched them
he sat there looking at me
WHAT DO YOU THINK OF PICASSO?

at first i said all right now not much do you write or paint?
yes
and?

and what? I ASKED IF YOU WROTE OR PAINTED. leave me alone i told him

WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN PUBLISHED? PAINTINGS HUNG?
nothing accepted
nothing accepted anywhere

do you believe in the war? he asked no i said

ARE YOU WILLING TO GO TO WAR? he asked no i said

WHY DON'T YOU BE A CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR? because i said

i am not sure there is a God

I AM NOT SURE THERE IS A GOD
NEXT WEDNESDAY NIGHT WE ARE HAVING A MEETING, A PARTY
FOR DOCTORS, WRITERS AND ARTISTS I WANT YOU TO BE
THERE I AM INVITING YOU WILL YOU COME?

no

all right he said u don't have to go
u mean i asked the party or the war?

either one he said you didn't think we'd understand did you?

no

he wrote something on a slip of paper and folded it and stuck it to my card with a paperclip give them this, up the line

he had written a hell of a lot on the slip as i walked i managed to lift the edge of the slip but all i cd see was

HIDES AN EXTREME.

SENSITIVITY UNDER A POKER FACE

which was news to me

and then some guy in a uniform screamed at me.

ALL RIGHT SON UNCLE SAM DOESN'T WANT YOU

and i walked out into

the clear and beautiful air.

are you going to war my landlady asked me no i said bad heart
that's too bad i'm sorry she said and i went upstairs and poured
a good one

bad heart bad heart bad heart have u done the wrong thing
maybe u ought to go maybe you ought to go and walk right into it

hell, friend they turned you down uncle sam does not want you
you are insane

i smiled and poured another one

i don't know how much later but some time later i am sitting in another cheap
room philly i am drinking a bottle of port have a record player and i am
listening to the 2nd movement of brahms' 2nd symphony

when there is a knock on the door
it is a very polite knock

and since i do not know anybody much i figure it is either
one of the whores down at the corner in love with me
or somebody come to give me the nobel prize

and i opened the door and 2 big men were there and one of them said F.B.I.
and the other one said yr under arrest

i went over and took the needle out of brahms' arm
we want to question u they said downtown
all right
u better put on a coat you might be gone some time

we walked down the stairs and out into the street and got into the car and it
seemed as if each window had a face hanging out of it and there was another
guy in the back and he said keep one hand on each knee and don't move them
we drove along a while and then

i reached up to scratch my nose

WATCH THAT HAND! one of them screamed
this guy is pretty casual another one said
i think we got a good one yep i think we got a good one

oh lord oh christ i thought i wonder what i done
i wonder what i done

they took me into a room that was mostly empty except for pictures
photos on the walls

you see those one of them pointed voice most serious
yes i said
those are men who died in the service of the fbi

they took me into another room where a man
sat behind his desk with his shirtsleeves rolled up

BUKOWSKI?

yes

HENRY C. JR.?

yes

WHERE THE HELL'S YOUR UNCLE JOHN?

my what?

WHERE THE HELL'S YOUR UNCLE JOHN?

i thought he meant i had some

kind of secret thing i was murdering people with

YOUR UNCLE: JOHN BUKOWSKI!

oh hell john he's dead

NO WONDER we can't find the son of a bitch!

WHY DID YOU DODGE THE DRAFT?

i'm 4f

4f eh?

psycho yes

why did you move without notifying your draft board?

i didn't bother jesus i thought it was over

why did you move?

i got kicked out for being drunk all the time

landlady said i got blood on the sheets

WHY DIDN'T YOU NOTIFY YOUR DRAFT BOARD?

look are you guys crazy i only moved around the corner 80 yards away gave
the post office my forwarding address if i wanted to hide i could do better than
that

NOW WE DIDN'T BEAT YOU, DID WE?

no

AND WE DIDN'T PUT HANDCUFFS ON YOU, DID WE?

no

WE ARE GOING TO HAVE TO HOLD YOU FOR FURTHER INVESTIGA-
TION....

they took me down to a small cell with toilet and sink

no bunk no chair i stood by the window and looked out the bars
it was Saturday morning and it was one of the main downtown
streets and it was sunny it looked good outside people
walking along easily unnerved a record shop speakered its
music onto the street i did not feel good you only begin to
miss the simple life after it is taken away from u after u go
into a hospital and u are on a bed maybe to die or go back
or in a jail never knowing when or if you'll get out
that's when you think that's when the sunshine looks good
that's when just walking down to the corner to buy a paper
is something like beethoven's 9th

i was transferred to a prison a much larger prison the next day
they put me in a cell with a little fat man who looked like
a businessman

he put out his hand: I am Courtney Taylor
public enemy number one
i shook his hand

what are you in for? he asked

they say i'm a draft dodger

listen he said there's just one thing we don't like around here
one kind we have no use for and that's the draft dodger

honor among thieves

eh?

what do you mean?

I mean u fucker,

leave me alone

leave me alone

if u want to kill yourself i'll tell you how he said

i don't want to hear it i said

all you do is take that bucket over there fill it with water
take your shoe off put your foot in it but first bring down
the overhead light i'll hold you on my shoulders and you can work
the screws loose from the pipe then u bend it down take the
globe out stick your finger in the hole yr foot in the bucket
and yr out of here

it sounded good to me but there was something grotesque and embarrassing
about it somehow so i decided not to do it

i stretched out on the bunk and pretty soon i felt things
biting me bedbugs

look i said do u gamble?

what do u mean?

i mean i said let's bet a nickel a bed bug i bet i can catch
more than u

they don't really come out till lights out he said

u mean it gets worse i asked

multiply by 30,

have u told the guard?

the screw? i'll tell him again

HEY SCREW SCREW !!! WE GOT BUDBUGS IN HERE ! GET
THESE GOD DAMNED BEDBUGS OUT OF HERE HEY SCREW !

nobody showed up

we began playing 21 blackjack and 5 minutes later the screw
walked in

let's not have so much screaming and you bastards probably
brought those things in here with you

i got hot in a crapgame in the exercise
yard and stayed hot 3, 4, 5 days and began to feel better i was
making more money than i ever made on the outside we were always
hungry there but after lights out the cook would come down with
jello and whipcream and coffee and bits of tenderloin and i'd slip
him a dollar or 2 and my public enemy friend stopped talking about
the evils of ceiling with a 4f and just when we were beginning to
enjoy our nickel a bedbug bets Taylor being a swindler of grand
order couldn't resist breaking some of his in half but i being
poetaster and counter of tombstones feeling the blade against my
whimpering brain i was more agile...and so psycho and public
enemy number one pinched out the souls of bedbugs while the world
grabbed its balls in more agony: ww 2
and we forgot in our small dying to acknowledge the small nobility
of whatever it was

BUTTT as i wuz saying

just as we were beginning to
enjoy our bedbugs they rushed us out of the cell

5 or 6 days after

the original complaint to fumigate

and they put me in with a polack

or something

old old old

he tore up my bedsheets the first time
i went to exercise yard to make a clothesline out of it

and i have a very sensitive skin despite my poker face
and the wool blankets only those who can't stand rough wool will
know what i mean and so i told the old man

he was always on the crapper
puffing on an empty pipe and all these makeshift makeshit
clotheslines hanging about dripping polack stockings and rags
(forget my name i am a Prussian nobleman) (this is fiction)
isn't it) (i am getting a little bored with this and could use a
hot piece of ass as what man cd not?)

he wuz always on the crapper
puffing and saying

TARA BUBU EAT TARA BUBU SHEET
TARA BUBU EAT TARA BUBU SHEET
over and over

then he'd laugh

he was telling me the facts of life but all i could feel
as the bluebirds were driven away from the white cliffs of dover
was that wool blanket against me all and everywhere

LISTEN YOU OLD FUCK i told him I'VE KILLED TWO MEN ALREADY
AND I'D JUST AS SOON KILL U AS SCRATCH MY ASS !!!

and the old idiot just laughed at me and for a moment i saw it
it was possible why not my hands about that wrinkled morgue of
flesh hoo says u can't kill what's already dead the eyes pop out
the tongue the lungs reach for air like kittens chasing a roll of
yarn but it was too ugly i don't think what got Dos in
Crime and Punishment was that a single man could not judge what to
eradicate but that he COULD and KNEW IT and it was easier to turn
it over to God because you would finally have to eradicate
everything including self (though u usually began with self and
by eradicating self you eradicated the rest) and that would make God
a failure and that would not do because if you eliminate God
you have to come down to self and Self built in 20 or 30 or 60 years
cannot match a 2000 year backlog of root and tradition and so Dos
did the wise thing in admitting that he could be wrong although he
felt right and i let the old man shit and spew tara bubu and slept
in wool blankets

they broke up the crap game from the tower
the screw pointed his m.g. down

the guy with the dice was taking too big a chunk from
each pot and the losers were getting hot I guess i should have
said it to the old man that way but one guy said to the furnisher
of dice DON'T PUT YOUR HAND IN THERE AGAIN UNTIL I TELL
U TO

and that was that until the screw got busy pointed his
steel nose

they came back for me and put me in some kind of room
they were making out a report

they asked me how to spell some words
like Andernach and so forth

i had a long red beard by then

and they asked me why

and i said

have you ever had the end cell where they
pass out one razorblade at the first cell and that same razor blade is
used by the last man in the last cell, and have you ever celled with an
old man whose only joy in life is eating and shitting and shaving and
wd u take 1/3 of his joy by taking the blade and shaving FIRST?
besides i use this red beard to fight the wool blankets with

i believe the kid is psycho one of them said

anyhow 3 or 4 days later

they let me out

only first i had to go through another physical for the army
but once again

i couldn't get past the sike

and that same day

when they let me out

even before i tried to get

a room i lay down in that park outside the philly library

i got on

my back and i felt little grass bugs crawling upon me and i let them
crawl they were beautifully clean

and i let the clouds come down

into my head but the sky was a bad color it hurt my eyes it was all
not good i began to fill up with sadness

and i heard some girls come by
talking and laughing and one of them tripped over my ankle

and then i fell back and went back to the clouds
until later

clambering up out of the misery of the tomb
i sat upon a park bench watching traffic go by
and then it came a long caravan of trucks
filled with good young soldiers who only wanted to live
and i was young and watching and for a moment i loved them the crowd
but once again they turned on me and from the first truck
came a hissing and a cursing and then a booing a racket of vile hate
they wanted me with them and the whole avenue filled with hot sound
and more trucks came by slowly and it was an opera it was an
opera of condemnation, but i had not wanted war never will and
the gods the gods the dice had been good and i waved an arm
and smiled somebody screamed YOU BASTARD GET OFF YOUR
DEAD ASS !

but i did not i watched them go where they were going
i imagine the one who fainted he was in there too

we were all
very young i was young they were young
but i imagine
war being swine mob being swine
i was not as young as they

ants

I used to be a great traveler, even without money. some cities I'd say in 2 weeks, some 3 days...for years I went through the cities, sometimes coming up against the same one 2 or 3 times.
now I'm here...not only the same city... the same apartment...for ten years... ten years...
the last person in here before me was crazy, they carried her off screaming
in a big white sheet, and I moved in.
it's all right...there have been various jobs, various women, various ways...
one bungles through, it seems... but it's the ants here,
the ants here are crazy, they keep building nests in the bathtub drain...in the water basin drain...
it's delicious and sanitary and ugly:
I turn on the hot water tap and watch them go spinning to a burning drowning hell...
it's neat...
but they keep coming back... more and more ants...
the ants come back faster than the women.
today I was about to do in a new batch, both tub and water basin,
the phone rang,
it was my friend Danny. he said,
listen, you are the only real man I know. I'm going to kill myself...
go, I said, ahead...
she left me, he said, she left me like that, hardly any notice...I really loved her. (he began to cry.)

listen, I said, meeting a bitch is an accident,
having one leave you is a basic reality,
be glad you're coming up against
basic reality...
thanks, he said (sobbing), and hung
up.
I went back to the ants and turned on both water
taps at
once.

I burned and drowned them good.

Then the phone rang,
listen, he said, I'm going to do it,
I'm really going to do it.

I hung up.

he wrote in lonely blood

sitting here
typing
at a friend's house
I find a black book by the typer:
Jeffers': *Be Angry at the Sun*.
I think of Jeffers often,
of his rocks and his hawks and his
isolation.
Jeffers was a real loner.
yes, he had to write.
I try to think of loners who don't break out
at all
in any fashion,
and I think, no, that's not strong,
somehow, that's dead.
Jeffers was alive and a loner and
he made his statements.
his rocks and his hawks and his isolation
counted.
he wrote in lonely blood
a man trapped in a corner
but what a corner
fighting down to the last mark

"I've built my rock," he sent the message to
the lovely girl who came to his door,
"you go build yours."
this was the same girl who had screwed Ezra,
and she wrote me that Jeffers sent her away
like that.

BE ANGRY AT THE SUN.
Jeffers was a rock who was not dead.
his book sits to my left now as I type.
I think of all his people crashing down
hanging themselves, shooting themselves,
taking poisons...
locked away against an unbearable humanity.
Jeffers was like his people:
he demanded perfection and beauty
and it was not there
in human form. he found it in non-human

forms. I've run out of non-human forms,
I'm angry at Jeffers. no,
I'm not. and if the girl comes to my door
I'll send her away too. after all,
who wants to follow old
Ez?

six chink fishermen

the other night
under a new moon
with the cuckoo clocks wound
tight
they stopped 6 Chinese fishermen
on skidrow
San Pedro
with 28 million dollars worth of
shit
in their boots.

they say it was an old dwarf
on a houseboat
who painted butterflies
on the sleeping body of his wife
in their pitiful
dream.

Artists, they say, sell out cheapest and most
quickly.

meanwhile, a fat man in Hong Kong
hearing,
decided to do away with Art,
and
while irritated
just to make Mr. Justice
soil his new clean sheets
he dialed a number
and arranged
the assassination of the
next-to-last
American
hero.

burning

and the pleasures of the past,
remembering the Goose Girl at Hollywood Park
1950,
red coats and trumpets
and faces cut with knives and mistakes;
I am ready for the final
retreat;
I have an old-time kerosene burner,
candles, 22 cans of Campbell's soup
and an 80 year old uncle in Andernach,
Germany
who was once the burgermeister of that
town I was born in
so long ago.
I ache all over with the melody of pain
and people knock at my door
come in and drink with me
and talk,
but they don't realize I've quit,
have cleaned up the kitchen
chased the mice out from under the bed
and am making ready
for the tallest flame of them all.

I look at buildings and clouds and ladies,
I read newspapers as my shoelaces break,
I dream of matadors brave and bulls brave
and people brave and cats brave and
can openers brave.

my uncle writes me in trembling hand:
"How is your little girl,
and is your health good? You didn't answer
my last letter..."

"Dear Uncle Heinrich," I answer,
"my little girl is very clever and pretty and
also good. I hope that you are

happy and well. I enclose a photo
of Marina. Answer when you are
able. Things here are the same as they
have always
been.

Love,
Henry"

a sound in the brush

the sorrow of Scibelli,
friend,
as he turned at a sound in the brush
and was bayoneted
by a man 5 feet tall who didn't even know
his name,
who then sliced his jugular vein,
took the gold from his teeth,
both ears,
then opened his wallet
and tore up the photo of a soft-faced
girl named
simply, "Laura,"
who was waiting in Kansas City
for an earless, tooth-ravished
bloody
Scibelli
who just happened to die a little earlier
than most of the rest of us,
also for
Cause
Unknown.

the wild

once in lockup, being fingerprinted and photographed, all that,
I dropped ashes from my cigarette on the floor
and the cop got mad, he said,
“by god, where the hell do you think you are?”
“County jail,” I said, and he said, “All right, wise guy, now you walk down
that corridor and then
take a left.”
I walked on down
took my left and
here it came—
they had this beast of a thing
in a huge cellblock, alone, alone,
and there were wires across the bars
it was the L.A. County drunktank
and it was their pet
the thing saw me
came running
and threw itself snarling against the bars and wire
wanting to kill me, and I stood there and watched it,
then spoke:
“Cigarette? how about a smoke?”
the thing rattled the wire and snarled a few more times
and I pulled out a smoke.
the thing grinned at me and I poked a cigarette through the
wire
put it in his lips and lit him
up.
“I dislike them too,” I said.
the thing grinned and bobbed its head
yes.

the cop came and took me away
and put me in a cell with
5 less living.

4th of july

it's amazing
the number of people who can't feel
pain.

put 40 in a room
squeezed against each other
hours of lethargic talk
and they don't
faint
scream
go mad or even
wince.

it appears as if they are waiting for
something that will never
arrive.

they are as comfortable as chickens or
pigs in their pens.

one might even consider it wisdom
if you can overlook the faces
and the conversation.

when the 4th is over
and they go back to their separate holes
then the sun will kiss me hello
then the sidewalks will look good again.

back in their cages
they'll dream of the next great
holiday.
probably Labor Day
smashing together on the freeways
talking together
40 in a room,
cousins, aunts, sisters, mothers, brothers, uncles,
sons, grandfathers, grandmothers, wives, husbands,
lovers, friends, all the rest,
40 in a room
talking about nothing,
talking about themselves.

carnival

he got drunk and went to sleep
in his bed
and the fire started
and he layed in there
burning
until a friend in the next room
smelled it
and ran in
and tried to pull him out of the fire
by his arms
and the skin rolled right off the arms
and he had to grab again
deeper
near the bone,
and he got him out and up
and the guy started screaming
and running blind,
he hit some walls
finally made 2 doorways
and with half a dozen men trying
to hold him
he broke free
and ran into the yeard
screaming
still running
he ran right into some barbed wire
and tangled in the barbed wire
screaming
and they had to go up
and get him loose
from the wire

he lived for 3 nights and 3
days

drinking and smoking
are bad for the
health.

99 degrees

September after Labor Day,
99 degrees in Burbank, Calif.
I am looking at a fly
a small brown fly on a yellow curtain;
the Mexicans would be wise enough to sleep under trees
on a day like this
but Americans are stricken with ambition
they will survive as powerful and unhappy
neurotics,
right now my tax money is dropping bombs
on starving people in Asia
as I fight the small fly that has arrived from the
curtain by my elbow;
I swing and miss the fly,
neurotic American me,
the boys who pilot those planes are nice boys, gentle,
they kill apathetically
with honor and grace,
without hate.
I know one, he is now a prof who teaches American
Literature at a university in Oregon,
I've been drunk with him and his wife, several times,
so he teaches me,
that's nice.
99 degrees in Burbank
and as I sit here
any number of things are happening,
mostly unhappy things
like swearing mechanics with hangovers climbing under cars
and drunken dentists pulling teeth and cursing
and bald-headed surgeons making too much of a mess,
and the editor of *Time* magazine backing his car out of the
driveway
after an argument with his wife;
it's 99 degrees in Burbank
and there's a jet overhead,
I don't think it will bomb me,
those Asians don't have enough tax money,
the only clever Asians are the ones who claim they are
Supremely Blessed, speak good English,
grow grey thick beards plus a heavenly smile topped by

shining eyes and
charge \$4 admit at the Shrine to
teach placidity and non-ambition
and screw half the intellectual girls in the city.
it's 99 degrees in Burbank
and those who will survive will survive
and those who will die will die,
and most will dry up and look like toads eating hamburger
sandwiches at noon,
I don't know what to do—
send money and the way,
be kind to me,
I like it
effortless, sweet and easy, remember,
I never bombed
anybody, I
can't even kill this
fly.

happy new year

I have them timed—
first the nurse will arrive in her nice
yellow automobile—4:10 p.m.—
she always shows me a lot of
leg—and I always look—
then think—
keep your leg, baby.
then, after that,
there's the man who arrives
and takes his bulldog
out to crap
about the time I'm out to mail
my letters. We test each other,
never speak—I live without working,
he works without
living;
I can see us some day
battling on his front lawn—
he screaming, "you bum!"
and myself screaming back:
"lackey! slave!"
as his bulldog chews my leg
and the neighbors pelt me
with stones.

I guess I better get interested in
Mexican jumping beans
and the Rose Bowl
Parade.

the shoelace

a woman, a
tire that's flat, a
disease, a
desire; fears in front of you,
fears that hold so still
you can study them
like pieces on a
chessboard...
it's not the large things that
send a man to the
madhouse. death he's ready for, or
murder, incest, robbery, fire, flood...
no, it's the continuing series of *small* tragedies
that send a man to the
madhouse...
not the death of his love
but a shoelace that snaps
with no time left...
the dread of life
is that swarm of trivialities
that can kill quicker than cancer
and which are always there—
license plates or taxes
or expired driver's license,
or hiring or firing,
doing it or having it done to you, or
constipation
speeding tickets
rickets or crickets or mice or termites or
roaches or flies or a
broken hook on a
screen, or out of gas
or too much gas,
the sink's stopped-up, the landlord's drunk,
the president doesn't care and the governor's
crazy.
lightswitch broken, mattress like a
porcupine;
\$105 for a tune-up, carburetor and fuel pump at
Sears Roebuck;

and the phone bill's up and the market's
down
and the toilet chain is
broken,
and the light has burned out—
the hall light, the front light, the back light,
the inner light; it's
darker than hell
and twice as
expensive.
then there's always crabs and ingrown toenails
and people who insist they're
your friends;
there's always that and worse;
leaky faucet, Christ and Christmas;
blue salami, 9 day rains,
50 cent avocados
and purple
liverwurst.

or making it
as a waitress at Norm's on the split shift,
or as an emptier of
bedpans,
or as a carwash or a busboy
or a stealer of old lady's purses
leaving them screaming on the sidewalks
with broken arms at the age of
80.

suddenly
2 red lights in your rear view mirror
and blood in your
underwear;
toothache, and \$979 for a bridge
\$300 for a gold
tooth,
and China and Russia and America, and
long hair and short hair and no
hair, and beards and no

faces, and plenty of zigzag but no
pot, except maybe one to piss in and
the other one around your
gut.

with each broken shoelace
out of one hundred broken shoelaces,
one man, one woman, one
thing
enters a
madhouse.

so be careful
when you
bend over.

chilled green

what is it?
an old woman, fat, yellow dress,
torn stockings
sitting on the curbing
with a little boy.
98 degrees at 3 in the afternoon
it seems
obscene.
but look, they are calm,
almost happy,
they eat the green jello
and the red roses shine.

life

to be eaten by a hog with
bad breath

as the lemons swing in the wind
yellow and ours.

III

*lovers everywhere
clutch like asparagus
leaves*

american matador

of course, he still gets his choice
after the bullfights,
but like with any other man
the special one comes along,
you can feel it in the stomach
when they get you there,
and the girl said,
"It's either bullfighting or me."

he turned on love
to look at the face of death.

you can see him at Tijuana
working close to the horn
taking chance after
chance. he's been gored
a number of times.

and you wonder if the thing is
working at his stomach
as he fights
getting him in closer
than he should

the sword is pointed
in the sunlight,
it goes in:
love.

i saw an old-fashioned whore today

at the Thrifty drugstore
buying a 5th of gin and a 5th of vodka
she was a dyed blond
and she was relaxed in a black and white striped dress
that fell just below knee-length
and her breasts were large
and she was a little bit fat
and the salesgirl who served her showed disgust
but the whore was used to all that
and waited for her change
and for the bottles to be bagged
and when the whore walked out
she walked out easily
and people looked up from their magazines
and the boys around the newsstand looked
and the people parking their cars looked
and I walked behind her
and I looked
and she got into a green car
pooltable green
lit a cigarette,
and I'm sure she drove off to someplace
magic
where people were always laughing and
the music was always playing
and the drinks were good
and the furniture and rugs were nice
and the mountains were tall
and there were 3 German shepherds on the lawn,
and when she made love you knew it
and the price was not a lifetime,
the blue cigarette smoke curling in the black
ashtray a little wet with beer and mix,
she'd roll you with the security of a leopard
getting a deer,
and you ought to see her in the bathtub
singing an aria from one of those
Italian operas.

*poem for barbara, poem for jane,
poem for frances, poem for
all or any of them*

the fish ate the flower
and the tombs whistled
Dixie
as you told me you didn't care
anymore

old men in the pawnshops of the world
looked around and killed themselves in my mind
when you said you
didn't care
anymore

the day I saw you with your new
lover
you and your new lover
walking down my boulevards
past the butcher shop
past the liquor store
past the real estate
agency

ha ha

suddenly I didn't care
anymore

I went into the store and I bought
a figurine of a fawn
a small cactus
a box of shrimp
a pair of green gloves
a paring knife
some incense
pepper milk eggs
a fifth of
whiskey
and a roadmap of lower
Texas

the clerk put it all in a bag
it bulged and was heavy and
at last I knew that I had
something.

short order

I took my girlfriend to your last poetry reading,
she said.

yes, yes? I asked.

she's young and pretty, she said.

and? I asked.

she hated your
guts.

then she stretched out on the couch
and pulled off her
boots.

I don't have very good legs,
she said.

all right, I thought, I don't have very good
poetry; she doesn't have very good
legs.

scramble two.

the dwarf

we'd had our icecream cones
been scared by a dog
picked flowers
held hands in the sunlight.

my little girl is 6
and as good a girl as can
be.

we walked back to my place
where two ladies were moving
out of the apartment
next door.

one was a dwarf,
quite squat
with short trunk-like
legs.

"Hank, what's wrong with that
woman?"

I'm sorry, little lady,
that my child didn't know
that there wasn't anything
wrong with you.

merry christmas

There I am
hungover, I've just made it in
and sit next to the mother of my child;
she sits there old and grey,
I sit there old and greying...
there's a 6 year old daughter,
it's Christmas at Edison Grammar School,
December 17th,
1 p.m.

I sit mostly with women.
ah, there's a guy, and there's a guy...
what's the matter with those bums?
no jobs? too
bad.

first there's something...
they need 5 nominations for the
P.T.A. board.
4 old dames nominate each other,
like sneaky Hitlers.
nobody wants the 5th nomination...
“Will everybody in favor of the nominations
being closed, please Yea in the
affirmative?”
there's a dog in there...somebody
steps on his
tail:
“YEA-IKE!” he goes...
everybody laughs, the nominations are closed.
Jesus Christ,
by a dog...

o.k., trot them on.
no wait. the orchestra. tiny little people with
tiny little violins, most serious little
people. they are the string section.
they play “Christmas Songs” under the direction
of Mr. Plepler and Mr. Mettler.
Mettler? oh well, it's not
very good.

"Five Little Christmas Bells," courtesy A.M. & P.M.
Kindergarten,
has been changed to "Rocking The Child."
no reason is
given.

the dog has been
kicked out. I am still there
with hangover.

next the Kindergartens sing
"Jingle Bells." they've been taught by
Mrs. Bowers, Miss Lemon, Miss Lieberman.

I check my program...
how much longer?

I notice that the children are black, white,
oriental, brown...it's integration
but it's easy, they show us how easy.
2nd, 3rd, 4th grades...
"Twelve Days of Christmas," they hold up paintings,
take them down; up down, up down, and back to
the Partridge in the Pear Tree.
they've done it. perfect. even with the
mistakes. courtesy Mrs. La Brache, Mrs. Bitticks.
next comes
"Pine Cones and Holly Berries," not so
good.

now here are the 5th and 6th graders...
"Santa and the Mouse"...
it's garbled, nobody can hear what they are
saying. it's under the direction of
Mr. Doerflinger. and he flings 'em.
he sits them down and sits right down with them
and all you can hear is
Mr. Doerflinger's beautiful voice.
Doerflinger seems everywhere. there he is in the center.
there he is showing his
buttocks. he likes to leap and run
about. he sings and sings and gives his 5th and 6th

graders the minor parts to back his
singular chorus. I try to force myself to get jealous
of Doerflinger but I
can't. I'm very happy that I am not
Mr. Doerflinger. a woman across the aisle turns to me:
"He has a beautiful voice," she says.
"Yes," I smile back,
"he has."

"Christmas Tree," 3rd, 4th, 5th graders.
then, of course, we have
"Deck the Halls."
courtesy of Mrs. Homes.

o, my god, it's the 1st and 2nd graders
now! I'm nervous as shit.
I'm sick, I
don't know what to
do. I've done time, lain in alleys drunk,
slept with 50 women, I can't take
it...the mother of my child seems
quite calm. I'm the
coward...where *is* she?
all of a sudden they bring them through the
back door—
they've been bringing them
through the front.
what's going on?

there's my kid, she's walking
past. "hi!" I say, "hi!"
she smiles and puts a finger to her
lips. "shhh..."

they file onto the
platform. 1st and 2nd graders,
c/o Mr. Garnes, Miss McCormick, Mrs. Nagata, Mrs.
Samarge. o.k.
"Too Fat for the Chimney" ...
not too good,
but she keeps looking at me and grinning,

singing, waving;
I smile back, wave, all
grins...the old jailbird...
then "Toy Trains."
much better. we applaud. they file out in order,
each waiting their
turn.

she's gone...
somewhere.

the remainder of the program loses
some meaning,
except a very sexy young
chicano teacher
in a yellow dress
comes out and sings
"Silent Night"
in Spanish.

meanwhile Mr. Doerflinger is seen running about,
in this door, out that
one, showing his buttocks,
racing across the stage in some
great
urgency...

"Doerflinger," says somebody.
he will not be forgotten by
anybody. he will not allow himself to be,
especially by the ladies.

it goes on.
"Let There Be Peace On Earth"
we all sing together. the last number on the
program.

taxpayers forget Christmas, remember instead how nice your
children are.

we get back to the mother's apartment

and there is a notice that they will shut off
the gas that
day. the mother claims no previous
notice has been
received.

I drive them down to 5th street
in Santa Monica
to the gas co.

I wave
goodbye. they stand on the corner.
my daughter has a hole
in her black
tights,
right
knee...

“Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me.
Let there be peace on earth,
The peace that was meant to be.
With God as our Father,
Brothers all are we—
Let me walk with my brother
In perfect harmony.”

marina:

majestic, magic
infinite
my little girl is
sun
on the carpet—
out the door
picking a
flower, ha!,
an old man,
battle-wrecked,
emerges from his
chair
and she looks at me
but only sees
love,
ha!, and I become
quick with the world
and love right back
just like I was meant
to do.

one with dante

I have lost it in Paradise Valley
with 4 women sitting in a kitchen
talking and laughing about men and love and life and
sex,
I have lost it in Paradise Valley
I have lost the word and the way and the light,
4 women sitting in the kitchen
drinking gallons of
coffee, and now
I sit in front of a window
looking at the desert,
one with Dante,
I wonder what the Paradise Valley ladies want.
these 3 sisters and a friend.

through this small window,
I see children dogs cattle horses flies sand
chickens ducks,
I hear the names of men now from the kitchen
and the girls laugh, and
I wonder, what am I
doing here?
these girls...this continual examination of the senses
and the ideas and the reasons and the facts and the
moods
destroys, destroys...

I have lost it in Paradise Valley.
you have to lose it somewhere:
I chose Arizona; although the love
last night was
good, I am lost in the desert
I have given it up.

an interesting night

my girlfriend
she started smashing
all my bottles
my whiskey bottle and my
beer bottles,
meanwhile
yelling and screaming,
then she ran
out the door.

3 police arrived 5 minutes
later,
one holding shotgun,
and they asked
various questions,
one of them being:
what do you
do?

I'm a writer,
I said.

the cop smirked at
me, walked over to the
typewriter,
picked up some papers
and started
reading.

it was my 2,000 word essay
on the meaning of
suicide.

he didn't seem much
interested.

after they left
I went all the way to
Altadena
and slept with a fine
22 year old girl

some pot
3 cats
3 homosexuals
a 7 year old boy
a dog, and
a 24 by 20 photo
of me
hanging over the fireplace,
looking
wise.

a threat to my immortality

she undressed in front of me
keeping her pussy to the front
while I layed in bed with a bottle of
beer.

where'd you get that wart on
your ass? I asked.

that's no wart, she said,
that's a mole, a kind of
birthmark.

that thing scares me, I said,
let's call
it off.

I got out of bed and
walked into the other room and
sat on the rocker
and rocked.

she walked out. now, listen, you
old fart. you've got warts and scars and
all kinds of things all over
you. I do believe you're the ugliest
old man
I've ever seen.

forget that, I said, tell me some more
about that
mole on your butt.

she walked into the other room
and got dressed and then ran past me
slammed the door
and was
gone.

and to think,
she'd read all my books of
poetry too.

I just hoped she wouldn't tell
anybody that
I wasn't pretty.

climax

I was somewhere...somewhere in Europe
act II, scene II
Siegfried...
the whole building shook
there was flame
world ending,
bodies hurled through air
like mad
clowns...
the orchestra quit
playing.
“It’s the BOMB! THE
BOMB!” somebody
screamed. the bomb the bomb the bomb
the bomb.
I grabbed a fat blonde
tore her dress away,
gotterdammerung!
“I don’t want to
die!” said the
blonde. the whole opera house was
coming down. blood on the
floor. more flame.
smoke. smoke. screaming. it was
terrible. I stuck it
in.

a man's woman

the dream of a man
is a whore with a gold tooth
and a garter belt,
perfumed
with false eyebrows
mascara
earrings
light pink panties
salami breath
high heels
long stockings with a very slight
run on back of left stocking,
a little bit fat,
a little bit drunk,
a little bit silly and a little bit crazy
who doesn't tell dirty jokes
and has 3 warts on her back
and pretends to enjoy symphony music
and who will stay a week
just one week
and wash the dishes and cook and fuck and suck
and scrub the kitchen floor
and not show any photos of her children
or talk about her x-husband or husband
or where she went to school or where she was born
or why she went to jail last time
or who she's in love with,
just stay one week
just one week
and do the thing and go and never come
back

for that one earring on the dresser.

tight pink dress

I read where this 44 year old soprano of some fame
fell out of a 4 story window
and killed herself, well, I suppose this is all right
for sopranos of some fame, but
I think that 8 stories is more
reasonable.
I know this woman, a sister of the mother of my
child, some years back
her husband divorced her
and she jumped out of a 4 story window
and broke both legs
and other assorted parts.
maybe that soprano just wasn't as tough as she was;
well, Helen got over the broken leg and parts,
and she came around one day to my place in a nice tight
pink dress, and we were alone but
nothing happened, I didn't want it to,
and we talked
and now she is really married to something,
one of the most obnoxious souls
that I know...
"he plays the flute," says the mother of my child,
"they get along..."
he came to see me one time and I ran him out the door:
he packed death around with him like breath chasers.
I've advised her to go 12 stories high
when this one fails...
I should have taken her the day she arrived in her
tight pink dress...
this guy and his flute...
he probably shits flutes...
and Helen with all that money, you think she might have
done better.

more or less, for julie:

on the Hammond or through the bomb-shadowed window,
through steak turned blue with the rot of drunken days,
through signature and saliva
through Savannah,
dark running streets like veins
caught in a juniper brush, through love spilled
behind a broken shade on an October day;
through forms and windows and lines,
through a book by Kafka stained with wine,
through wives and friends and jails,
standing young once
hearing Beethoven or Bruckner,
or even riding a bicycle,
young as that,
impossible,
coming across the bridge
in Philadelphia
and meeting your first whore,
falling on the ice, drunk and numbed,
you picking up she, she picking up he,
until at last, laughing across all barriers,
no marriage was ever more innocent or blessed,
and I remember her name and yes her eyes,
and a small mole on her left shoulder,
and so we go down, down in sadness, sadness,
sitting in a grease-stained room
listening to the corn boil.

this is the way it goes and goes and goes

*"All your writing about pain and suffering is
a bunch of bullshit."—*

just because I told you that rock music
hurts my head
just because we have slept and awakened and
eaten together
just because we've been in cars and at racetracks
together
in parks in bathtubs in rooms
together
just because we've seen the same swan and the same
dog at the same time
just because we've seen the same wind blow the same
curtain
you have suddenly become a literary critic

just because you have sculpted my head
and read my books
and told me of your loves and your flirtations and
your travels
just because I know the name of your daughter
and have changed a flat tire for you
you have suddenly become a literary critic

just because you've had 3 poems accepted by a mimeo mag
just because you're writing a novel about your own madness
just because you shake your ass and have long brown hair
you have suddenly become a literary critic

just because I have fucked you 144 times
you have suddenly become a literary critic

well, then, tell me,
of all these writers...who's pain is real?
what? yes, I might have
guessed—your pain is
real. so, in the best interest of us all
wave goodbye to the living who have lost the strength
to weep, and
as white ladies in pink rooms put on
blue and green earrings,
wave goodbye to me.

left with the dog

men in white t-shirts (unbothered
by life) are walking their
dogs
outside
as I watch a professional basketball
game on
t.v. and
I have no interest
in who will win but I do notice
a lady in the grandstand crossing
her legs (my editor phoned me last night at 10:15 p.m. and
found me asleep—
maybe that's why he has to
print the unpublished works of
Gertrude Stein).

very bad
symphony music now
(I mean bad for me)
the violin sings of dank life and the
grave and I am a student of
both.

here now
my love has gone looking
for an apartment in Venice,
California and
she has left me with her
dog (a not quite immaculate creature named
Stubby
who sits behind my chair listening to a violin and
a typewriter).

they say
fire-eaters, traffic cops, boxers and
clerks in department stores
sometimes know the
truth. (I do what I
can.)

the best one can settle for
is an afternoon
with the rent paid, some food in the refrigerator,
and death something like
a bad painting by a bad painter
(that you finally buy because there's not
anything else
around).

my love has gone looking for an apartment
in Venice, California across the top of the sky
something marches upsidedown;

praying for a best seller

waiting for my novelist friend to put the
word down
she sits in the kitchen
thinking about the madhouse
thinking about her x-husband
while I entertain her 3 year old child
who is now in the bathtub;
well, listen, I guess after a madhouse or
2 you need a few breaks...
my novelist friend may be crazy *now*
or she wouldn't be in the same house
with me,
or maybe I'm the one who's crazy:
she's told me a couple of times she's going to
cut off my balls if I do this thing or
that thing.
well, taking a chance with my balls on the line
that way
it had better be a good novel
or at least a bad one that is a best seller.

I sit here rolling cigarette after cigarette
while listening to her
type.
I suppose that for each genius launched
5 or 6 people must suffer for
it
them
him
her.

very well.

that one

your child has no name
your hair has no color
your face has no flesh
your feet have no toes
your country has ten flags

your voice has no tongue
your ideas slide like snakes
your eyes do not match

you eat bouquets of flowers
throw poisoned meat to the dogs

I see you linger in alleys with a club
I see you with a knife for anybody
I see you peddling a fishhead for a heart

and when the sun comes churning down
you'll come walking in from the kitchen
with a drink in your hand
humming the latest tune
and smiling at me in your red tight dress
extraordinary...

have you ever kissed a panther?

this woman thinks she's a panther
and sometimes when we are making love
she'll snarl and spit
and her hair comes down
and she looks out from the strands
and shows me her fangs
but I kiss her anyhow and continue to love.
have you ever kissed a panther?
have you ever seen a female panther enjoying
the act of love?
you haven't loved, friend.
you with your squirrels and chipmunks
and elephants and sheep.
you ought to sleep with a panther
you'll never again want
squirrels, chipmunks, elephants, sheep, fox,
wolverines,
never anything but the female panther
the female panther walking across the room
the female panther walking across your soul,
all other love songs are lies
when that black smooth fur moves against you
and the sky falls down against your back,
the female panther is the dream arrived real
and there's no going back
or wanting to—
the fur up against you,
the search over
and you are locked against the eyes of a panther.

2 carnations

my love brought me 2 carnations
my love brought me red
my love brought me her
my love told me not to worry
my love told me not to die

my love is 2 carnations on a table
while listening to Schoenberg
on an evening darkening into night

my love is young
the carnations burn in the dark;
she is gone leaving the taste of almonds
her body tastes like almonds

2 carnations burning red
as she sits far away
now dreaming of china dogs
tinkling through her fingers

my love is ten thousand carnations burning
my love is a hummingbird sitting that quiet moment
on the bough
as the cat
crouches.

man and woman in bed at 10 p.m.

I feel like a can of sardines, she said.
I feel like a band-aid, I said,
I feel like a tuna fish sandwich, she said.
I feel like a sliced tomato, I said.
I feel like it's gonna rain, she said.
I feel like the clock has stopped, I said.
I feel like the door's unlocked, she said.
I feel like an elephant's gonna walk in, I said.
I feel like we ought to pay the rent, she said.
I feel like we oughta get a job, I said.
I feel like you oughta get a job, she said.

I don't feel like working, I said.

I feel like you don't care for me, she said.
I feel like we oughta make love, I said.
I feel like we've been making too much love, she said.
I feel like we oughta make more love, I said.
I feel like you oughta get a job, she said.
I feel like you oughta get a job, I said.
I feel like a drink, she said.
I feel like a 5th of whiskey, I said.
I feel like we're going to end up on wine, she said.
I feel like you're right, I said.
I feel like giving up, she said.
I feel like I need a bath, I said.
I feel like you need a bath too, she said.
I feel like you ought to bathe my back, I said.
I feel like you don't love me, she said.
I feel like I do love you, I said.
I feel that thing in me now, she said.
I feel that thing in you now too, I said.
I feel like I love you now, she said.
I feel like I love you more than you do me, I said.
I feel wonderful, she said, I feel like screaming.
I feel like going on forever, I said.
I feel like you can, she said.
I feel, I said.
I feel, she said.

the answer

she runs into the front room from outside
laughing,

well, you always wanted a CRAZY woman,
didn't you?
hahahaha, ha.
you've always been fascinated with CRAZY women,
haven't you?
hahahaha, ha.

sit down, I say, I have the coffee water
on.

we sit by the kitchen window on a Los Angeles
Sunday,
and I say,

see that man walking by?

yes, she says.

know what he's thinking?
I ask.

what's he thinking?
she asks.

he's thinking, I say, he's thinking
that he wants a loaf of bread for
breakfast.

a loaf of bread for breakfast?

yes, can you imagine some crazy son of a bitch
wanting a loaf of bread for
breakfast?

I can't imagine it.

I get up and pour the coffees. then
we look at each

other. something has gone wrong the
night before and we want to find out
if it was her upset stomach
or my diarrhea
or something worse.

we lift our coffees, touch them in toast,
our eyes spark the question
and we sit by a kitchen window on a Los Angeles
Sunday,
waiting.

a split

death, he said, let it come,
it was after the races,
zipper on pants broken,
\$80 winner
out one woman
he drove through stop signs and
red lights
at 70 m.p.h. on a side street
and then he heard the noise—
he was smashing through a barricade of
street obstructions
boards and lights flying
things jumping on the hood,
the car was thrown against the curbing
and he straightened it just in time
to miss a parked car,
he was drunk but it was the first time in
35 years he had hit anything,
and he ran up a dead end street,
turned, came on out,
took two rights
and 5 minutes later he was inside his
apartment. He got on the phone
and an hour later there were 14 people
drinking with him,
all but the right one,
and the next day he was sick
and she was there
and she said she had lost her purse out of
town (\$55 and all her i.d.), 100 miles out of town,
she had gotten tired of waiting for him to phone
or not to phone;
she said, let's not have any more splits, I can't
bear them,
and he vomited, and she said,
all you want to do is kill yourself.
he said, all right, no more splits,
but he knew it would happen again and again
right down to the last split,
and he got up and cleaned his mouth and washed
and got back into bed with her

and she held him like a baby,
and he thought, hell, what kind of man am I?
and then he didn't care
and they kissed
and it was all right until
next time.

power failure

was all set to write an immortal poem,
it was 9:30 p.m.,
had taken me all day to get the juices
properly aligned,
I sat down to the typewriter
reached for the keys and then
all the lights in the neighborhood went out.
she was working on her novel.
well, she said, we might as well go to
bed.
we went to bed.
since we had fucked 5 times in 2 nights
we decided it might be a better time to
tell eerie stories.
she told me one about the 2 sisters lost in the woods
who came upon the madman's house, but it was
cold and dark and he was nowhere about
so they decided to go in, and one sister slept in
one bed and the other slept in the other,
and later in the night one sister was awakened by
this squeaking sound
and she looked up and here was the madman
rocking back and forth in this rocker
with her sister's head in his lap,
and I told one
about how these two bums were in a skidrow room
and one bum sat on the floor and stuck his hand in his
mouth and ate his hand and then his arm and then ate the
other hand and soon ate himself up while the other bum
watched, and then the other bum sat on the floor and did
the same thing, and the story ends with this neon sign
blinking color off and on across the vacant floor...
well, we went to sleep
and then we were awakened when all the lights came on
plus the radio and the t.v.,
and I said, oh god, life is back again,
and she said, well, we might as well sleep now,
and so I got up and turned everything off
and we closed our eyes
and she thought, there goes my immortal novel,
and I thought, there goes my immortal poem,

everything depends upon some type of electricity,
the street lights kept me awake for 30 minutes,
then I dreamed that I ate matchsticks and lightbulbs
for a living and I was the best in my trade.

snake in the watermelon

we french kissed in the bathtub
then got up and rode the merrygoround
I fell over backwards in the chair
then we ate 2 cheese sandwiches
watered the plants and
read the *New York Times*.
the essence is in the action
the action is the essence,
between the moon and the sea and the ring
in the bathtub
the tame rats become more beautiful
than long red hair,
my father's hands cut steak again
I roller skate before pygmies with green eyes,
the snake in the watermelon shakes the shopping cart,
we entered between the sheets which were as
delicious as miracles and walks in the park,
the hawk smiled daylight and nighttime,
we rode past frogs and elephants
past mines in mountains
past cripples working ouija boards,
she had toes on her feet
I had toes on my feet
we rode up and down and away
around,
it was sensible and pliable and holy
and felt very good
very very good,
the red lights blinked
the zepplin flew away
the war ended,
we stretched out then
and looked at the ceiling
a calm sea of a ceiling,
it was all right,
then we got back in the bathtub together
and french kissed
some more.

style

style is the answer to everything—
a fresh way to approach a dull or a
dangerous thing.

to do a dull thing with style
is preferable to doing a dangerous thing
without it.

Joan of Arc had style
John the Baptist
Christ
Socrates
Caesar,
Garcia Lorca.

style is the difference,
a way of doing,
a way of being done.

6 herons standing quietly in a pool of water
or you walking out of the bathroom naked
without seeing
me.

the shower

we like to shower afterwards
(I like the water hotter than she)
and her face is always soft and peaceful
and she'll wash me first
spread the soap over my balls
lift the balls
squeeze them,
then wash the cock:
"hey, this thing is still hard!"
then get all the hair down there,—
the belly, the back, the neck, the legs,
I grin grin grin,
and then I wash her...
first the cunt, I
stand behind her, my cock in the cheeks of her ass
I gently soap up the cunt hairs,
wash there with a soothing motion,
I linger perhaps longer than necessary,
then I get the backs of the legs, the ass,
the back, the neck, I turn her, kiss her,
soap up the breasts, get them and the belly, the neck,
the fronts of the legs, the ankles, the feet,
and then the cunt, once more, for luck...
another kiss, and she gets out first,
toweling, sometimes singing while I stay in
turn the water on hotter
feeling the good times of love's miracle
I then get out...
it is usually mid-afternoon and quiet,
and getting dressed we talk about what else
there might be to do,
but being together solves most of it,
in fact, solves all of it
for as long as those things stay solved
in the history of woman and
man, it's different for each
better and worse for each—
for me, it's splendid enough to remember
past the marching of armies
and the horses that walk the streets outside
past the memories of pain and defeat and unhappiness:

Linda, you brought it to me,
when you take it away
do it slowly and easily
make it as if I were dying in my sleep instead of in
my life, amen.

if we take—

if we take what we can see—
the engines driving us mad,
lovers finally hating;
this fish in the market
staring upward into our minds;
flowers rotting, flies web-caught;
riots, roars of caged lions,
clowns in love with dollar bills,
nations moving people like pawns;
daylight thieves with beautiful
nighttime wives and wines;
the crowded jails,
the commonplace unemployed,
dying grass, 2-bit fires;
men old enough to love the grave.

These things, and others, in content
show life swinging on a rotten axis.

But they've left us a bit of music
and a spiked show in the corner,
a jigger of scotch, a blue necktie,
a small volume of poems by Rimbaud,
a horse running as if the devil were
twisting his tail
over bluegrass and screaming, and then,
love again
like a streetcar turning the corner
on time,
the city waiting,
the wine and the flowers,
the water walking across the lake
and summer and winter and summer and summer
and winter again.

About the Author

CHARLES BUKOWSKI is one of America's best-known contemporary writers of poetry and prose, and, many would claim, its most influential and imitated poet. He was born in Andernach, Germany, to an American soldier father and a German mother in 1920, and brought to the United States at the age of three. He was raised in Los Angeles and lived there for fifty years. He published his first story in 1944 when he was twenty-four and began writing poetry at the age of thirty-five. He died in San Pedro, California, on March 9, 1994, at the age of seventy-three, shortly after completing his last novel, *Pulp* (1994).

During his lifetime he published more than forty-five books of poetry and prose, including the novels *Post Office* (1971), *Factotum* (1975), *Women* (1978), *Ham on Rye* (1982), and *Hollywood* (1989). Among his most recent books are the posthumous editions of *What Matters Most Is How Well You Walk Through the Fire* (1999), *Open All Night: New Poems* (2000), *Beerspit Night and Cursing: The Correspondence of Charles Bukowski and Sheri Martinelli 1960—1967* (2001), and *The Night Torn Mad with Footsteps: New Poems* (2001).

All of his books have now been published in translation in over a dozen languages and his worldwide popularity remains undiminished. In the years to come, Ecco will publish additional volumes of previously uncollected poetry and letters.

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